

PARKS PLAN

2013 - 2017

Vision and Mission

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Vision

Toronto is a vibrant city offering safe, welcoming and well-maintained parks and trails, a sustainable and expanding urban forest, and quality recreation facilities and programs supporting diverse needs for active, healthy lifestyles and engaged communities.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Mission

To improve the quality of life of Toronto's diverse communities by providing safe, beautiful parks, a healthy, expanding urban forest, and high quality, community-focused recreational experiences.

The following vision and mission statements will guide park services over the next five years:

Parks Vision

Welcoming, well-maintained, safe and sustainable parks.

Parks Mission

Enrich communities and lives by designing, building and operating quality parks.

Executive Summary

The 2013-2017 Parks Plan is the first of its kind for the City of Toronto. This document will guide Parks, Forestry and Recreation's delivery of service over the next five years. The Parks Plan directions and recommended actions aim to connect people and communities with parks, advance greening and environmental sustainability, improve the quality of parks, and build a legacy park system for Toronto.

Parks are essential to making Toronto an attractive place to live, work, and visit. Toronto's parks offer a broad range of outdoor leisure and recreation opportunities, transportation routes, and places for residents to interact with nature, and with one another. Parks also provide important economic benefits: they attract tourists and businesses, and help to build a healthy workforce. They provide shade, produce oxygen, and store stormwater. Parks are necessary elements for healthy individuals, communities, and natural habitat.

The City of Toronto recognizes the importance of parks and trails and the benefits they provide. Since *Our Common Grounds*, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation strategic plan adopted by City Council in 2004, the Division has built on its vision of "a city within a park" by maintaining and improving the parks system. Toronto residents use and value parks in great numbers. For example, in the Parks Plan survey, 93% of respondents said that parks are an indispensable part of the city. While this Parks Plan is built on a strong foundation of public support, it also outlines the broad range of issues that form the context for parks planning.

This Parks Plan offers a vision of how Parks, Forestry and Recreation can continue to improve in areas that require greater focus, and how to build on its strengths. A key priority through this plan is to encourage the public's use and involvement in parks, while at the same time preserving these spaces for future generations.

The 2013-2017 Parks Plan recognizes and addresses the following trends:

- A growing and increasingly diverse population means more users, and competition for use of limited park space
- A population that is aging, and increasingly inactive
- High demand for amenities like horticulture, community gardens, shade, drinking fountains and washrooms
- High demand for community involvement in park programming, design and decision making
- Increasing involvement of partners and volunteers
- Need to protect environmentally sensitive areas, and to preserve parks for future generations
- Damage to parks and trails from excessive and unsustainable use
- Increasing extreme weather, including droughts and storms that damage parks

- The requirement to adapt facilities and services to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with a Disability Act
- Need for data collection to provide consistent information on park use

Extensive research and public consultation identified four key themes, which form an organizational framework for the Plan. For each theme, current practices and public feedback point to the following 12 Parks Plan directions. Detailed recommended actions are found in the table that follows.

Communicate and connect with users

1. Improve communications and outreach
2. Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement
3. Improve the permitting system to enhance park use

Preserve and promote nature

4. Improve the management of natural areas
5. Improve natural environment trails
6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations

Maintain quality parks

7. Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails
8. Improve park spaces
9. Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture

Improve system planning

10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland
12. Continue to increase accessibility

The Parks Plan directions will strengthen the capacity of the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division to manage the overall parks system. Competing demands, new expectations and high use of parkland in a growing city, as well as sustainability, equity and accessibility considerations require coordinated action from City divisions, external partners, residents and stakeholders across the city.

Planning for great parks is an ongoing process. This Parks Plan focuses on the delivery of parks services, and sets priorities for further planning and new investment.

Summary of Directions and Recommended Actions

COMMUNICATE AND CONNECT WITH USERS

Directions	Recommended actions
1. Improve communications and outreach	1.1 Improve promotion and access to information regarding parks and trails by implementing a comprehensive communications and outreach strategy
2. Increase opportunities for resident, group and stakeholder involvement	<p>2.1 Establish an urban park ranger program to facilitate community involvement, provide public education, support problem solving and increase staff presence in parks</p> <p>2.2 Create and implement a community engagement framework that provides guiding principles and sets priorities for community engagement in the parks system</p> <p>2.3 Develop a centralized volunteer management system</p> <p>2.4 Continue to expand donation, partnership and sponsorship opportunities</p>
3. Improve the permitting system to enhance park use	<p>3.1 Improve the permitting system by increasing online information and services</p> <p>3.2 Conduct a review of the permitting system from a customer service perspective</p> <p>3.3 Enhance reporting standards for permits to better understand the use of parks, and to achieve equity goals through permitting</p>

PRESERVE AND PROMOTE NATURE

Directions	Recommended actions
4. Improve the management of natural areas	<p>4.1 Implement a program to strengthen the management of sensitive natural areas to ensure that environmentally significant areas are protected and continue to function and flourish for the long term</p> <p>4.2 Determine thresholds of use and develop criteria and measures to protect parkland from excessive use</p> <p>4.3 Increase staff knowledge and skills to better manage environmentally sensitive lands</p>

5. Improve natural environment trails	5.1 Develop and implement a program to plan, design, manage and maintain natural environment trails on parkland and in ravines to ensure the protection, restoration and enhancement of natural areas
6. Integrate emerging trends and technologies into parks operations	6.1 Continue to improve water, energy and fuel efficiency through operating and landscaping practices, the use of new and alternative technologies, and through fleet and small engine improvements

MAINTAIN QUALITY PARKS

Directions	Recommended actions
7. Advance the quality and consistency of parkland and trails	7.1 Enhance and automate the Parks Inspection Program to ensure park quality, safety, and accessibility 7.2 Work with Municipal Licensing and Standards Division to improve bylaw enforcement in parks 7.3 Continue to design high quality, sustainable parks that provide a sense of place for residents and communities
8. Improve park spaces	8.1 Improve park maintenance and park amenities such as seating, shade areas and washrooms, with a focus on creating social gathering spaces in parks and along trails
9. Demonstrate, educate and inspire through horticulture and urban agriculture	9.1 Strategically place horticulture displays in high visibility areas and expand signage, education and volunteer experiences 9.2 Augment urban agriculture programming through increased public education, training, and enhanced support services, and through investment in garden creation, renewal and repair

IMPROVE SYSTEM PLANNING

Directions	Recommended actions
10. Develop a plan to guide facility provision and land acquisition	<p>10.1 Develop a 20-year Parks, Forestry and Recreation facilities plan</p> <p>10.2 Update the strategy for the dedication and acquisition of parkland that continues to prioritize parkland acquisition in underserved areas and address City priorities</p> <p>10.3 Work with City Planning and other divisions and partners to identify opportunities and enhance the City's capacity to expand the parks system</p> <p>10.4 Complete a comprehensive inventory and mapping of parks, trails and assets</p>
11. Develop tools to guide and enhance the use of parkland	<p>11.1 Implement the park classification system to guide planning and decision-making across the system of parks and trails</p> <p>11.2 Develop policies, standards and measures to support the appropriate use of parks and trails that guide planning, design, space allocation and permitting, and that address emerging and exclusive uses</p> <p>11.3 Improve and coordinate trail mapping, classification, maintenance, way-finding and connections to other public realm elements</p>
12. Continue to increase accessibility	<p>12.1 Engage disability stakeholder groups in developing requirements to improve the universal accessibility of park amenities and features</p> <p>12.2 Ensure that parks and trails meet or exceed provincial accessibility requirements</p>